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ABSTRACT

This study examined the correspondence between parents' and children's orientations toward the use of physical punishment. A series of vignettes concerning child misbehavior was shown to children and their parents. Subjects were asked to assess the likelihood of their responding to the situation shown by spanking the child in the vignette. Attitudes toward spanking, and the frequency of spanking in the parent-child relationship, were assessed. Few sex differences were found. For 5-year-olds, there was a correlation between parents' spanking beliefs and children's reports of being spanked, but no correlation between parents' spanking beliefs and children's responses to the vignettes. For eight-year-olds, there was a decreased correlation between parents' beliefs and children's reports of being spanked. For college students, there were few correlations between parents' beliefs and children's reports of being spanked, but higher correlations between students' responses to the vignette and students' perceptions of their parents' intentions and attitudes. Students' perceptions of parental attitudes about physical punishment were found to predict students' own attitudes. The data appears to mean that children's perceptions of their parents' beliefs about punishment are more significant than actual parental practices. A list of five references is provided. (BC)

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Passing the rod: Similarities between parents' and children's orientations toward physical punishment

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Passing the rod: Similarities between parents and children's orientations toward physical punishment

It is generally thought that one of the major influences and determinants on parenting is the individual's experience with parenting in their family of origin. Our discussant's work in this area have been important to our present work as she has begun to articulate some of the prime conceptual matters and proposed a model of transmission. Of the many points she has made in her writings (Cashmore & Goodnow, 1985; Goodnow, in press), I want to mention two. First she has highlighted the distinction between actual and perceived correspondence between generations. With actual correspondence, members from each generation share the same ideas. In perceived correspondence, one member thinks they share a similar point of view when in fact, they do not. And a second important point she has made is that transmission is influenced not just by perceived correspondence but by whether the parental message is accepted. Thus, she has argued that transmission is a two-process model.

I will briefly describe some of our initial efforts to document this form of cultural transmission by looking at the correspondence between parents and their children's orientations toward the use of one particular child-rearing behavior--that of physical punishment. We chose to focus on that disciplinary behavior for a variety of reasons, including: 1) parents typically have clear beliefs about its use; 2) it is a discrete, unambiguous, and salient behavior so it is likely to be reported more accurately than many other parenting behaviors (indeed, we have found and others report evidence for its reliability as assessed by high test-retest stability); 3) there is considerable variability in its use (i.e., a small percentage of parents don't use it, a relatively small percentage of parents using it many times a week, and the rest fall in the middle); 4) and it is a behavior that is generally localized and confined to the privacy of one's home, thus training in the use of spanking is generally limited to experience from one's own parents. For those and other reasons (such as its association with child abuse), it represents an important and, we think, exemplary child-rearing behavior to explore both in terms as a good behavior with which to look for early indications of parent to child transmission and later we suspect in some cases, a good behavior for identifying

discontinuity . Though there have been a few studies in this area (e.g., Radke, 1946; Simons, et al. 1991; Wolfe et al., 1982), none to date have concentrated on the physical punishment (at least in the detail you will be hearing!).

So in the work I am going to describe, our primary dependent variable for transmission was the correspondence between parents' and children's beliefs about the use of physical punishment. The central way in which we assessed beliefs was to collect behavioral intentions to spank based on responses to vignettes about child misbehavior. This approach allowed us to assess responses from children at three ages: 5, 8, 19 and from their parents. Behavioral intention ratings (on 1 to 7 scales)--of the likelihood of spanking in response to 12 short vignettes concerning child misbehavior (e.g., "Your child is playing in the front yard and wants to go across the street and play with the neighbor child in their front yard. You tell your child to wait a few minutes until you can help her across the street. A few minutes later you look up and see that your child has just crossed the street by herself. How likely would you be to spank the 5-year-old child."). In addition, we were also interested in assessing with older subjects a second type of belief, a more global, generalized level of belief--that of attitudes toward spanking. Finally we assessed reports of practices with regard to spanking as another source and possibly predictor of children's beliefs.

We then faced a considerable dilemma in designing this study: What age to focus on. It would be easiest to focus on college students and their parents' current beliefs and reports of spanking--but in our pilot testing not one student would admit they were still being spanked! Instead, we opted for the methodologically messier, but more valid age period of age 5 as the focal age. We selected 5 because it is commonly found to about the peak age of spanking and believed that 5 year olds were cognitively advanced enough to be able to respond to the vignettes. That would allow their parents to report on their current practices and beliefs about spanking (Table 1). However we were also interested in looking at what happened to children's beliefs about spanking when they were not being spanked as frequently (and in collecting additional data from more articulate subjects!), so we also included a sample of 8-year-olds. Based on pilot testing, we decided to elicit their reports of their current experiences (as we didn't trust their retrospective reports), but

their parents would report on their prior practices and beliefs (when their children were 5) and 19-year-students and their parents who also use age 5 as the focal point.

Let me point out that if you systematically manipulate the prior and current perceptions of children and parents, you can have a lot of permutations. For instance we could have asked 19 year olds to try to recollect, when they were five, their parents' attitudes toward spanking--but we thought that was a bit contrived. So trust us in our decisions about whether to collect current reports or retrospective reports. We have some evidence that may lessen your concern about which time-frame we selected. Parents' report considerable stability in their perceptions about their orientations toward spanking (Table 2). We also have, with a small number of 8 year olds, reports of stability in their perceptions of how frequently they were spanked at age 5 and how frequently they currently are spanked. As you can see, there appears to be considerable continuity.

This paper will focus on four basic hypotheses: 1) we expected that young children--5-year-olds--would model their intentions to spank more after their parents' practices that either index of parental belief; 2) older children--8-year-olds--who were no longer at the prime age for spanking, would hold intentions to spank based more on parental intentions and attitudes rather than prior practices; and, in line with Goodnow's work, 3) perceived correspondence would be higher than actual correspondence in 8 and 19 year olds; and 4) continuity of transmission would be higher when the children accepted that message.

Twenty 5-year-olds, 20 8-year-olds, and 64 college students who averaged 19-years-old, all of their mothers and about 85% of their fathers participated. About half of the children were girls. Around 70 to 80% of the parents were college educated.

First, we found very few sex differences, so we collapsed across gender. The data from the 5-year-old children and their parents revealed that there were a number of reliable correlations between children's reports of being spanked and their parents' spanking practices and beliefs. However, when we look at the children's behavioral intentions, we see little evidence of for transmission of actual correspondence (Table 3). All but one of the trends or reliable correlations were between children's reports of being spanked and parental variables. Only one trend was with

children's intentions. It is unclear whether that is due to methodological problems or that they had not yet internalized the message about their parents' orientations toward physical punishment. But because we did pick of the reliable correlations between being spanked and parental variables, we think that the 5 year olds have not yet picked up the message. (We did not collect information about perceived correspondence, but we suspect they would not yet be able to report on that.)

With the 8-year-olds we found a somewhat different pattern of correlations of Actual Correspondence (Table 4). Now the magnitude of the correlations between children's reports of parental practices and parental variables is not as high as with the 5 year olds. However there is more suggestion of the transmission taking place as now three out of the six correlations are above .35 though their significance is hampered by the low number of subjects. So we are beginning to get evidence here of the continuity in actual correspondence or transmission. When we look at the perceived correspondence (Table 5), we find the correlations are considerably higher.

How about the association between college students beliefs about spanking and their parents beliefs? As Table 6 reveals, very few associations were found with Actual Correspondence (Table 6) and of the three, all were weak and one was in the opposite direction. But when we look at Perceived Correspondence we find a dramatically different picture (Table 7). Here, as you can see the correlations between perceived correspondence between students own intentions and their perceptions of their parents were at .77 and .81 and for attitudes .64 and .55.

So students' perceptions of their parents' beliefs about the use of spanking correlates highly with their own (though the means for both perceived maternal and paternal variables are higher than the students'). But the second part of Goodnow's Two Process model involves the acceptance or rejection of the perceived message. To test that model, we conducted Hierarchical multiple regressions, using a stepwise, forced entry procedure. We regressed on students' own attitudes and students' own intentions toward spanking. What we found in both cases was that it was perceived maternal attitudes (or perceived intentions) and to a lesser extent, perceived paternal attitudes (or perceived intentions) that were the significant predictors of students' attitudes (or intentions). For example, when regressing on 19-year-olds attitudes, we first entered their

perception of their mothers' attitudes. That model resulted in an adjusted R square of .40 (R square .42), $F(2, 61) = 21.91$, $p < .0001$. Perceived paternal attitudes did not significantly increase the predictability of the model. For intentions, both perceived maternal and paternal intentions entered into the model. The adjusted R square based on perceived maternal intentions was .59, and it increased to . 69 when perceived fathers' intentions was added to the model. However, acceptance--as measured by the students' ratings of how effective spanking was--did not significantly increase the predictive strength of either the attitude or intention model.

One problem with that analysis was the restricted range of the variable. Only 7 subjects rated it as not effective, 18 as moderately effective, and 39 as highly effective. Consequently, we tried a different analytic approach. We formed three groups based on those effectiveness ratings--low, medium, and high. Then we computed the perceived correspondence. Unfortunately there were not enough subjects who regarded it as not effective to make much out of their correlations. However, for those that only moderately accepted it , the four correlations between their own intentions and attitudes and their perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' intentions and attitudes ranged from .37 to .75. However with the 39 19 year olds who thought it was highly effective, each of the four correlations of perceived correspondence were higher ranging from .63 to .84.

One problem may have been in how we operationalized acceptance--as their ratings of effectiveness of spanking. Nevertheless, this does provide support for her model.

So let me summarize and conclude. As our initial effort in this area of intergenerational transmission of parenting, we have learned a lot--besides there are a lot of methodological problems. We were essentially unable to identify any evidence of transmission with 5 year old children. However by age 8, we did find evidence for both actual and, more dramatically, perceived correspondence. By age 19, there is strong evidence for perceived correspondence--that is perceptions of their parents' beliefs may be a greater influence in links between generations than the actual parental practices. We did find some support for Goodnow's 2 process model. Like Cashmore and Goodnow (1985) found, the best predictor of the 19-year-olds' attitudes and intentions was the his or her perception of the mothers and fathers' beliefs.

One of the most interesting findings was of course, the discrepancy between actual and perceived correspondence. We are investigating that result further by trying to determine whether there is bias in parental retrospective and/or current reports of spanking practices and beliefs or bias in children's perceptions of their parents that are creating that discrepancy. We will be working on it with cross sectional approaches and hope to have some more answers when this conference reconvenes in two years.

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Table 1. Measures and Time Frame used with each of the Three Age Groups (c = current; r = retrospective)

	5-year-old		8-year-old		19-year-old	
	Child	Parent	Child	Parent	Child	Parent
Child Measures						
Frequency of being Spanked	C		C & R		R	
Intentions to Spank	C		C		C	
Perception of Parents' Intentions			C		C	
Attitudes toward Spanking					C	
Perception of Parents' Attitudes					C	
Acceptance of Spanking					C	
Parent Measures						
Frequency of Spanking		C		C & R		R
Intentions to Spank		C		R		R
Attitudes toward Spanking		C		C & R		C & R

Table 2. Reports of Current and Retrospective Reports (IntraClass Correlations)

	Mothers	Fathers	8-Year-Old Children
Current & Retrospective (3 years ago) Attitudes	.96***	.88***	
Current & Retrospective (15 years ago) Attitudes	.92 ***	.86***	
Current & Retrospective (3 years) Reports of Frequency of being spanked			.93***

Notes. ns	Mothers	Fathers	Children
Current & 3 yrs	32	22	13
Current & 15 yrs	61	55	

*** p <.001

Table 3. Correlations between 5-year-olds and their Parents: Actual Correspondence

	Mothers'			Fathers'		
	Current Practices	Current Intentions	Current Attitudes	Current Practices	Current Intentions	Current Attitudes
Children's Reports of Being Spanked	.50*	.46+	.50*	.40+	(.34)	.48+
Children's Current Intentions	.33+	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

+ p <.10
* p < .05
n = 20 mothers, n = 15 fathers

Table 4. Correlations between 8-year-olds and their parents: Actual Correspondence

	Mothers'			Fathers'	
	Prior Practices	Prior Intentions	Prior Attitudes	Prior Practices	Prior Intentions	Prior Attitudes
Children's Reports of Being Spanked	ns	.36+	.41+	(.32)	.47+	.65*
Children's Current Intentions	.36+	ns	.41+	(.39)	ns	ns

+ $p < .10$
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

n = 20 mothers, n = 12 fathers

Table 5. Correlations between 8-year-olds and their parents: Perceived correspondence

	Perceptions of Mothers' Intentions	Perceptions of Fathers' Intentions
Children's Current Intentions	.79***	.91***

*** $p < .001$

n = 20 mothers, n = 12 fathers

Table 6. Correlations between College Students and their Parents: Actual Correspondence

	Mothers'			Fathers'		
	Prior Practices	Prior Intentions	Prior Attitudes	Prior Practices	Prior Intentions	Prior Attitudes
Students' Reports of Having Been Spanked	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Students' Current Intentions	ns	ns	ns	-.24+	ns	ns
Students' Current Attitudes	ns	.22+	.24*	ns	ns	ns

+ $p < .10$
* $p < .05$

n = 64 mothers, n = 55 fathers

Table 7. Students and their Perceptions of their Parents: Perceived Correspondence

	Perception of Mothers'		Perception of Fathers'	
	Prior Intentions	Prior Attitudes	Prior Intentions	Prior Attitudes
Students' Current Intentions	.77***	.26*	.81***	.44**
Students' Current Attitudes	.38***	.64***	.36**	.55***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

n = 64 mothers, n = 55 fathers